

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3693

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV MARR LE SY PLO
SUBJ: GREAT EXPECTATIONS - PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 3601

1. SUMMARY. ON EVE OF JULY 30 DATE SET BY PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE-SYRIAN ASF COMMITTEE (REFTEL) FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST STAGE OF PLAN TO APPLY CAIRO ACCORD AND CEASE-FIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON, MOST PALESTINIANS, REMARKABLY ENOUGH, SEEM DETERMINED TO GO AHEAD WITH THEIR COMMITMENTS. REPORTS FROM THE FIELD SUGGEST THEY HAVE ALREADY BEGUN REDEPLOYMENTS. INTENSIVE POLITICAL CONTACTS AMONG THE PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE AND SYRIANS CONTINUE. EVERYONE WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY OVER NEXT FEW DAYS, AS PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES SEEM TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. END SUMMARY.

2. GROUND SITUATION IN THE SOUTH. ALTHOUGH USUAL ARTILLERY
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DUELS HAVE CONTINUED IN SOUTH APPARENTLY UNABATED OVER LAST FEW DAYS, VARIOUS REPORTS SUGGEST REAL STEPS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN PRIOR TO JULY 30 DATE SET TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENTS. LOCAL REUTERS STRINGER TOURED AREA JULY 26 AND REPORTED THAT PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS HAD ALREADY ABANDONED SOUTHERN COASTAL ROAD IN VICINITY OF NAKOURA.

HE ALSO SAID CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAVE ABANDONED VILLAGE OF ALMA AL-SHAAB NEAR ISRAELI BORDER.

3. SITUATION AROUND BEIRUT CAMPS. A KEY ELEMENT OF TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT AT SHTAURA JULY 25 WAS THAT PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS WOULD CLOSE THEIR OFFICES OUTSIDE OF REFUGEE CAMPS. BEIRUT PRESS JULY 29 REPORTS THAT VARIOUS PALESTINIAN OFFICES HAVE ALREADY BEEN EVACUATED AROUND SABRA AND SOUTHERN BEIRUT AND THAT PALESTINIAN MILITARY POSITIONS OUTSIDE OF CAMPS HAVE LIKEWISE BEEN ELIMINATED. HOWEVER, WE ALSO HAVE REPORTS THAT REJECTIONIST ELEMENTS ARE POSTING UP SIGNS IN CAMPS OPPOSING GIVING UP ARMS.

4. INTENSIVE POLITICAL CONTACTS. FATAH LEADERS ABU IAYD, ABU SALEH AND ABU MAZEN SAW PRESIDENT ASAD OF SYRIA JULY 26. PLO SAME DAY FORMED NEW "HIGH SECURITY COMMITTEE" COMPRISING ABU SALEH (FATAH), ADELRAHMAN AHMED (ALF) AND YASSER ABDRABBUH (PFLP), TO ORGANIZE ENFORCEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN SIDE OF AGREEMENT. YASSER ARAFAT, NOW BACK IN BEIRUT, AND ABU IYAD ARE EXPECTED TO MEET PRESIDENT SARKIS JULY 29. LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS HAS INDICATED THAT HE MAY WELL SEE SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM IN NEXT FEW DAYS. TALK HAS EVEN SURFACED OF A REVIVAL OF ARAB LEAGUE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE (SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA,

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EGYPT AND KUWAIT), BUT KUWAITI AMBASSADOR BOUJAYAN JULY 28 SAID HE HAD NO INFORMATION TO THIS EFFECT.

5. POSITIVE PALESTINE ATTITUDES. SPEAKING TO JOURNALISTS JULY 27, ABU IYAD SAID, "THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS ARE ON LEBANESE LAND AND LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY IS THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN ANYTHING RELATING TO LEBANESE TERRITORY, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS." HE SAID PLO WOULD HAVE PREFERRED "IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORD" TO BEGIN IN SOUTH LEBANON RATHER THAN IN CAMPS AROUND BEIRUT BUT, "IT'S ALL UP TO THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES." HE SAID HE THOUGHT LEBANESE ARMY WOULD INDEED SOON BE ABLE TO DEPLOY FORCES IN SOUTH. WE HAVE SEVERAL INDINATIONS THAT PFLP AND PDPLP ARE JOING FATAH AND SAIQA IN THEIR SERIOUSNESS ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE AGREEMENTS. WE WOULD EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT IRAQI-BACKED OR INFLUENCED GROUPS SUCH AS ARAB LIBERATION FRONT AND FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE MIGHT CAUSE PROBLEMS SIMPLY TO EMBARRASS THE SYRIANS.

6. LEBANESE ATTITUDES. ACCORDING TO AN NAHAR, FORMER

PRESIDENT FRANGIE SAID PRESIDENT SARKSI WAS "MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN AT ANY TIME BEFORE." FRANGIE HIMSELF, AS WELL AS PIERRE GEMAYEL (JUST RETURNED FROM MOROCCO), MEANWHILE, STILL MAINTAIN "SHOW ME" ATTITUDE.

7. EXPECTATIONS. ALTHOUGH ASF ELEMENTS ARE SUPPOSED TO OCCUPY POSITIONS AROUND BEIRUT AREA CAMPS BEGINNING JULY 30, PRESS JULY 29 SPECULATES THAT JULY 30 AND 31 WILL BE LEFT OPEN TO AVOID PROBLEMS AND THAT ASF UNITS WILL NOT DEPLOY UNTIL MONDAY, AUGUST 1. OTHER PROJECTS EXPECTED WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, ACCORDING TO PRESS JULY 29, INCLUDE: A) DETERMINATION OF EXACT BOUNDARIES OF THE CAMPS THEMSELVES; B) BEGINNING COLLECTION OF HEAVY WEAPONS -- ACCORDING TO IKE, "UNDER PALESTINIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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SUPERVISION BUT WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LEBANESE ARMY AND THE ASF"; C) ELIMINATION OF ARMED AND UNIFORMED PALESTINIANS OUTSIDE THE CAMPS, EXCEPT FOR PALESTINIAN ARMED STRUGGLE COMMAND MEMBERS; D) A CENSUS OF PALESTINIANS LIVING OUTSIDE THE CAMPS "SO THAT LEBANESE LAW PERTAINING TO NON-LEBANESE RESIDENTS MAY BE APPLIED TO THEM." FOR THE SOUTH, APPLICATION OF THE AGREEMENT IS NOT EXPECTED FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER WEEK, PENDING GOL'S EFFORTS TO FIELD A MILITARY FORCE IN THE AREA.

8. COMMENTS. IT ALL SEEMS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. MOST SURPRISING ASPECT OF APPARENT NEW PLO ATTITUDE IS REPORTED COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE EVEN OF MANY REJECTIONISTS. OUR GUESS AT THIS POINT IS THAT PALESTINIANS WILL INDEED ABIDE BY AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR COMMITMENT, BUT THAT THEY WILL NOT ABIDE BY A FULL AND RIGOROUS APPLICATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORD ALONG THE LINES OF THE GOL INTERPRETATION. IN PARTICULAR, THEY WILL NOT TURN OVER ALL -- OR EVEN MOST -- OF THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS. NEVERTHELESS, IF OUR ANTICIPATION PROVES CORRECT, GOL, AND ALSO SYRIAN GOVERNMENT, WILL BE ABLE TO POINT FOR ONCE TO A TANGIBLE SUCCESS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO FIND A WAY TO APPLY CAIRO ACCORD AND ESTABLISH A CEASE-FIRE IN SOUTH BY "POLITICAL" RATHER THAN BY MILITARY MEANS. THIS SHOULD STRENGTHEN HAND OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT CONSIDERABLY VIS-A-VIS CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST FRONT, AND COULD EVEN OPEN UP PERSPECTIVES FOR LEBANESE POLITICAL RECONCILIATION WHICH UNTIL NOW HAVE BEEN INCONCEIVABLE. THE NEXT FEW DAYS WILL BE CRUCIAL.

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